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AUTHOR	Grafton, Lee
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ABSTRACT

The "new reality" of Australia's involvement with Asia has brought an added urgency to the call for curriculum inclusions that ensure appropriate and positive levels of Australian engagement with countries of the Asian region. This paper discusses the "Delors" report and considers its "Learning To Know, Learning To Do, Learning To Live Together and Learning To Be" framework in the context of the Asian-Pacific's place in Australian arts education. Highlighted is the Asia Education Foundation (AEF), established in 1992 as a national organization to promote Asian studies in Australian schools. (BT)

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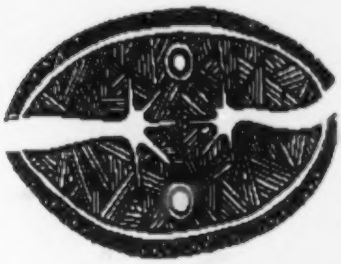

InSEA

"Including Asia in the Arts Curriculum: A Terra Incognita"

by

Lee Grafton
Curriculum Officer, Studies of Asia
Department of Training and Employment
South Australia

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J. Boyd

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INCLUDING ASIA IN THE ARTS CURRICULUM: *A TERRA INCOGNITA*

Lee Grafton; *Curriculum Officer, Studies of Asia,* Department of Training and Employment, South Australia.

Greg Sheridan, writing about leaders in Asia, (Sheridan, Greg 1997 *Tigers; Leaders of the new Asia-Pacific* Allen and Unwin, NSW), comments on the debate about Australia's place in the Asian region by making the point that whichever group is in power in this country, there is now no real choice regarding Australia's involvement with Asia, as "This is the reality for the new Australia" (p167).

The implications of this 'new reality' for us as educators has brought an added urgency to the call for curriculum inclusions that ensure appropriate and positive levels of engagement with countries of the Asian region. The *Delors* Report, from which the Congress sub-themes are drawn, attempts to identify the current state of affairs and project desirable directions for education, not only in this region of course, but for all education sectors around the world. The report argues that the impact of globalisation, (a term which Sheridan argues really means-for Australian governments anyway, 'Asian competition'), (*Tigers,* ibid pxiii), calls for dialogue to be held across national borders. The so-called 'Asian crisis' and the subsequent dialogue has, if anything, strengthened our resolve to provide a balanced and sound understanding of our region through school curricula. As educators we can never isolate our environment from our neighbours, nor align our curriculum response simply with the economic success stories of Asia. Thus Delors' *Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live Together* and *Learning to Be* take on added meaning in the context of Australia's place in the Asia-Pacific.

In the past, perceptions of Asia played a major role in shaping our national culture, in ways all of us would recognise as stifling, negative and counterproductive. In not allowing the future generation of Australians to continue this experience, we need to have classrooms which include studies of Asia, whilst not neglecting the societies and cultures from which most of us have sprung. Professor Colin Brown, (from an address to participants of the *Including Studies of Asia in Curriculum* professional development program 1998, Flinders University, South Australia), in recognising one third of all immigration to Australia as originating in Asia, (after Luxembourg, Australia is now the world's most multicultural nation), calls for a profound response if we are to engage with the 'new reality'. Such recognition, he argues "does not call for a jettisoning of that part of our social and cultural heritage which comes from Europe. That would be foolish in the extreme. The push for greater Asia-awareness in our educational system is at base a push for a more open-minded educational system with a greater range of choices. We will not achieve that outcome by excluding any of the cultures in which we have our personal origins, or limiting the range of cultural choices our children have available to them".

For us, as arts educators, we only have to look at current curriculum documents to see that Asia has been practically excluded. Indeed, a South Australian review of the nationally developed Arts Statement and Profile found "The pointers used to illustrate the outcomes of arts learning present a picture of Australian society as being static

and unchanging and monocultural rather than as dynamic and multicultural", and "Insufficient emphasis is given to the needs of all students within Australia's multicultural society". (*Report on the Arts Statement and Profile*, undated, *Issues* 2.3 p3 and 6.2). Such findings raise profound implications for what teachers (and students) need to know. Here we should perhaps discover why this exclusion has occurred. There are many answers. Part of the answer can be found in early modernism that introduced the material cultures of Asia into the consciousness of Europeans, but at the same time conceptually located visual works of Asian material culture outside the realm of art. From a post modern perspective, however, we now understand how the description of distinctive categories such as 'primitive,' 'tribal,' or 'folk' art, pejoratively marginalised these works, and hence the groups that made them. This view consequently precluded such objects from serious critical and aesthetic discourse and allowed them to be seen as part of a hierarchy culminating in Western 'fine art'. This in turn allowed discussion of these arts to be excluded from art theory, history or criticism courses at art schools or universities. If we are to *Learn to Live Together*, which argues that in the current context of globalisation, people must come to understand others, (and by implication for us, their art), then we have a responsibility to initiate art education programs that develop an interpretive strategy and appropriate responses to works of art from other cultures. In viewing works of art from Asia, and making them relevant to the classroom, I am drawn to briefly explore the *reader-response* theories advocated by Fish and others. (Fish, S. 1980 *Is there a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 3). Reader-response theorists insist that meaning develops within the dynamic relationship between reader and text established during the act of reading, or to project it into our context, viewing. This position validates the subjective response of viewers, but it faces the objection of subjectivism. Are there not as many experiences of a work of art as there are viewers? What is the basis for common viewing experience or for shared meaning, and what are the dangers inherent in such a view? To illustrate this point in relation to Asian art, I have a favourite story.....

On the afternoon of 13 January, 1910, E.B. Havell addressed the Royal Society of Arts in London on the subject, 'Arts Administration in India'. Havell had recently returned from Calcutta, and had set out to overturn the 'prejudiced attitudes held by most British observers and inculcated among many educated Indians as well'. The chairman was George Birdwood, an old India hand. Through his positions as curator of the India Office Museum, organiser of the Indian displays at the South Kensington exhibitions, and referee for the Indian section of the South Kensington Museum, Birdwood had been a prime arbiter of taste concerning Indian art in London for some 40 years. He was also the epitome of the prejudice that Havell had just criticised. Birdwood rose to his feet, and pointing to a photograph of a Javanese Buddha image, remarked, "This senseless similitude, in its immemorial fixed pose, is nothing more than an uninspired brazen image, vacuously squinting down its nose to its thumbs, knees and toes. A boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionless purity and serenity of soul". I have many such stories, but suffice to illustrate the point that different interpretive communities viewing the same object but working with different interpretive strategies may engender very different readings. Interpretive strategies are not therefore natural but learned within particular social settings. They can and do change. Whilst we would no longer countenance such views as that held by Birdwood, the question remains; what interpretive strategies are we

bringing to bear when we view the arts of Asia? Just take the current Asia-pacific Triennial. How do we approach the works there and how do we include them in arts discourse in our classrooms? How much of our response has changed and to what extent? For many the show will be just as inaccessible as Birdwood's Javanese Buddha image, a state of affairs which reflects badly on our curricula. Through the title of this short paper, I suggest a state of ignorance of the arts of Asia prevail, with only now some attention being given to redress the problem. Through the inclusion of Asia in art curricula, we provide opportunities for students to develop interpretive strategies to learn about the cultures of some of the peoples of Asia, based upon appropriate assumptions, knowledge and understanding.

Here I would like to argue some 'appropriate assumptions' for the inclusion of the art of Asia in curriculum, loosely modelled around the sub-themes.

- *Learning to Know* provides a foundation for lifelong learning, together with in-depth work on selected subjects. We need to know that our concept of Asia is a Western geo-political construction for an enormously complex and diverse group of peoples, languages, cultures, religions and philosophies, and how such an understanding will impact on education. We need to recognise that political boundaries drawn in the main by colonial and imperialistic powers often divide common ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups, and how the term 'Asian art' is often devoid of useful meaning,
- *Learning to Do* emphasises the learning of skills, not only for the workplace, but for an ability to face a variety of situations; encountering Asian cultures, peoples and the arts, establishing partnerships with Asian artists, businesses and educators, (just as we are doing in this Congress),
- *Learning to Live Together* means we should develop an understanding that judgements about 'Asia' should be derived from knowledge of the cultural values and traditions from within the society studied, and not from other alien traditions. Only from this understanding can living and interacting peacefully occur, and
- *Learning to Be* emphasises the development of human potential to the full. We must no longer accept the cultural and educational ethos of Australia as being acceptably Eurocentric. As arts educators, we must develop inclusive practice to empower groups marginalised by exclusive curriculum or established norms and ways of doing things. Studying the arts of Asia widens the qualities of imagination and potential for responses to 'the other'.

The Asia Education Foundation (AEF) whom I represent today, recognises these assumptions through its work in some 1500 *Access Asia* schools around the country. The Foundation was established in 1992 as a national organisation to promote the studies of Asia in Australian schools. The Foundation is a proactive body with a strategic plan based on best practice in achieving change in schools. Through three major programs, **Curriculum Development Program, Schools Development Program** and **Partnerships and Professional Development Program,** 'The Asia Education Foundation has made its symbol a respected, national education icon heralding the inclusion of studies of Asia on the Australian curriculum map in an environment characterised by rapid change and constrained by a host of econmic, educational, political, social, cultural, and management uncertainties'. (Baumgart, Professor Neil 1996, *An Evaluation of the First Three Years of the Asia Education Foundation).*

The AEF also works with the Council of Australian Government's National Asian Languages and Studies for Australian Schools (NALSAS) Taskforce to assist in achieving the target of 100% of year 10 students graduating with significant skills in the understanding of Asian cultures by the year 2003. One such NALSAS initiative managed by the AEF, has been the development of the *Studies of Asia Professional Development Modules*, comprising modules in *Teaching Asia, The Arts, English*, and *Society and the Environment*. Modules are being trialled this year through partnerships with respective state education systems and the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, Flinders University, South Australia, La Trobe University, Victoria, Queensland University of Technology, University of Tasmania, and the Australian National University. However, only two universities can find the resources to present the Arts of Asia Modules!

Through the work of the AEF, the arts of Asia now feature in curriculum, and will soon do so in many more schools around the country. In this presentation today I would like to illustrate how this is happening by screening an excerpt from the video, *The Arts. The Heart of Cultures. Teaching for Cultural Diversity*. (Department For Education and Children's Services 1997. South Australia).

The video addresses major concepts associated with *Learning to Live Together, Learning to Do, Learning to Be and Learning to Know*, presenting an understanding of cultural inclusivity and arts education in multicultural Australia. The video explores examples of classroom practice through four cultural contexts, identified by Andreacchio (Andreacchio, Vincenzo 1995 'Cultural Understandings or Misunderstandings' ESLTA Journal, p22), which give direction, provide structure and assist understanding in relation to culture. These are the **intercultural context, crosscultural context, intracultural context** and **multicultural context.** The booklet accompanying the video outlines each of the contexts and demonstrates how units of work can be prepared to address them.

The video begins ....

Australia's a place of many cultures...Culture is a continuous creation. It makes us as we make it. It's expressed in many ways-obvious and not-but one of the most direct expressions is through the arts.

Our cultures are dynamic and diverse. And our arts should, and do, reflect that...but the arts can also function as a bridge between diversity.

And this bridging process can begin with arts education at school.

(George Donikian, presenter in the video).